

Good morning Madam Chairman, Board members, invited panelists, participants and interested media.

My name is Allen Robinson, Ph.D. I am Director of the Highway Safety Center at Indiana University of Pennsylvania and Chief Executive Officer of the American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association.

"I am pleased to speak at this Public Forum on Driver Education and Training. This issue is of concern not only to those of us in this room, it is vital to all of America. Nearly all of our society drives cars and our young people are no exception.

The fatality rate of drivers in the United States is far better than any other country. It still is not satisfactory. Clearly the easiest way to further reduce this fatality rate is to restrict driving privileges. For example, your initial driver license would be at age 20 and your licensing privilege would end at age 65. We all know that this is totally unacceptable in our society. Therefore we are here today to discuss responsible solutions to solving this problem. The specific program solution we are discussing is Driver Education and Training.

It is important that we strive to find solutions and not use the easy approach of reducing fatalities by simply restricting driver licenses. In driver education we have historically made many mistakes. The single biggest mistake has been to overstate our program outcomes.

In 1955 traffic safety professionals said that Driver Education reduces teen fatalities 50 percent.

In 1981 the Safe Performance Secondary Driver Education Demonstration Project "DeKalb Study" said that driver education would reduce teen fatalities by 10 percent.

Clearly both of these statements are ridiculous. No single countermeasure can reduce fatalities by these percentages. We have clearly overstated the purpose of driver education. In addition, the wrong approach has been used to evaluate driver education. No other countermeasure is evaluated employing a control/experimental group comparison with fatality reduction utilizing official accident records as the only criteria for demonstrating successful programs.

This approach simply does not work. Sample sizes are not large enough, official traffic records are inadequate, and controlling the research design is impossible.

This method or technique to determine effectiveness is not used for seat belt programs, current alcohol programs, driver licensing, or any of the single components of graduated driver licensing.

It is true that newly enacted GDL programs have a significant reduction in fatalities of young drivers the first two years of the program. This is primarily due to driver restrictions. If 16 year olds don't drive, they are not killed as drivers. However, they still show up in the passenger deaths. The greatest value of GDL is that a combination of countermeasures are working together to reduce fatalities.

It is essential that driver education be included as one of those countermeasures. Most of us in this room learned to drive a car through driver education; most of our children learned to drive through driver education. How can we expect new drivers to learn to drive if we don't teach them how to do so?

Driver education has been an essential tool in teaching basic driving skills. That is start, stop, turn and basic interaction with other drivers. These requirements are essential in getting a drivers license and in gaining initial driving experience. Driver education needs to have better resources and techniques in order to teach safe driving practices. This includes making good choices concerning risk, driver decision, use of occupant restraints, not driving under the influence, dealing with fatigue, distractions and aggressive drivers.

How do we expect new drivers to understand all of the basic concepts and skills if we simply tell them to learn on their own. Driver licensing alone will not do this; driver restrictions alone will not do this. We must have driver education programs that do teach basic driving skills and safe driving practices to the youth of our nation. We must quit trying to evaluate driver education simply by comparing control/experimental groups with official accident records using fatalities as the primary criteria.

There is not enough time here today to completely describe what I feel needs to be done. I am providing a hand out to the Board that describes in detail what driver education should be and how it should be delivered and what outcomes we should expect.

There will be other panelists who will share their good ideas on addressing this problem. Yes, there will be others that simply say driver education does not reduce teen fatalities.

We must create awareness of the young driver problem and develop a solution to deal with this problem. This includes a major overhaul of the current driver education training programs, teaching training programs and methods of evaluating program effectiveness.

Let me share with you my ideas on improving driver education. To accomplish any changes in society, you must first create an awareness of the problem and an understanding of the solution to the problem.

The task of reducing highway collisions involving young drivers is a goal that almost seems impossible to accomplish. However, with combined resources, expertise and financial support, this goal could become a reality. A strong foundation needs to be laid to fully utilize all available asset

An informational campaign needs to be developed and it should clearly outline the problems and solutions facing driver education. We need to communicate this information to Corporate America, the general public and the traffic safety community. To achieve success with driver education and training, we need everyone working together on common problems, and solutions.

One component of the awareness effort is to clearly define what the young driver problems are and how we can reduce these problems. Corporations and traffic safety professionals have a different understanding and perception of what driver education is. Even within the driver education community, there is also a lack of specification as to what driver education is. This is **an understandable problem**. Without "national leadership", everyone has done their own thing. As a result, what driver education is in one community is entirely different in another community. Driver education is whatever you want it to be.

There are many single-purpose organizations that work in traffic safety. These organizations include youth groups, alcohol groups, seat belt coalition, MADD and others who know their specific area of interest regarding safety. They also have some knowledge of the specific education/awareness they promote. Solving a single issue with young drivers does not solve the problem. Without formal driver education, there is a limited audience for these single-purpose programs.

The second component is the driver education teacher. Most teachers are of retirement age. They have not even stayed current with existing driver education concepts, let alone progressed to new theories of training young drivers. New teachers have not entered the field because the job prospect has been limited. As a result, colleges and universities have dropped teacher training programs for Driver Education, and many state education offices do not require training standards nor do they provide supervision and guidance to the driver education programs for young drivers.

The monitoring of both basic driver education programs and teacher training programs is limited at best. Federal and state resources have been reduced and driver education has suffered.

What we need today is clear direction at the national level, with the support of all federal, state, and private agencies to plan, implement, and monitor a concentrated effort to provide complete training programs to all new drivers.

The American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association stands ready to work cooperatively with all interested parties to accomplish this goal. It is impossible for us to do so alone. This is a national problem that requires national recognition and national program solutions.

